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# OPERATION ICEBERG: CAMPAIGNING IN THE RYUKYUS

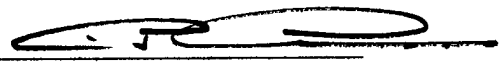
## AN OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

by

G. VANCE CORBETT
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: 

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Abstract of

**OPERATION ICEBERG: CAMPAIGNING IN THE RYUKYUS**

**AN OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS**

Operation ICEBERG, the campaign for the Ryukyus and the Keramas, was the largest naval campaign conducted in the Pacific theater during World War II. ICEBERG was the last of five major amphibious operations that collectively represent the evolution of amphibious warfare over the course of the war. Guadalcanal (8-9 August 1942), Tarawa (20 November 1943), Leyte Gulf (24 October 1944), and Iwo Jima (19 February 1945), as precursors to the Ryukyus Campaign, are remembered as the major milestones enroute to final victory. (Arguably, the less-studied Bougainville operation (1 November 1943) may be inserted into this sequence based on demonstrated advances in the application of combined arms and logistics.) Focused on the largest of the Ryukyus (Okinawa), Operation ICEBERG represents the final episode in the four-year advance across the Pacific.

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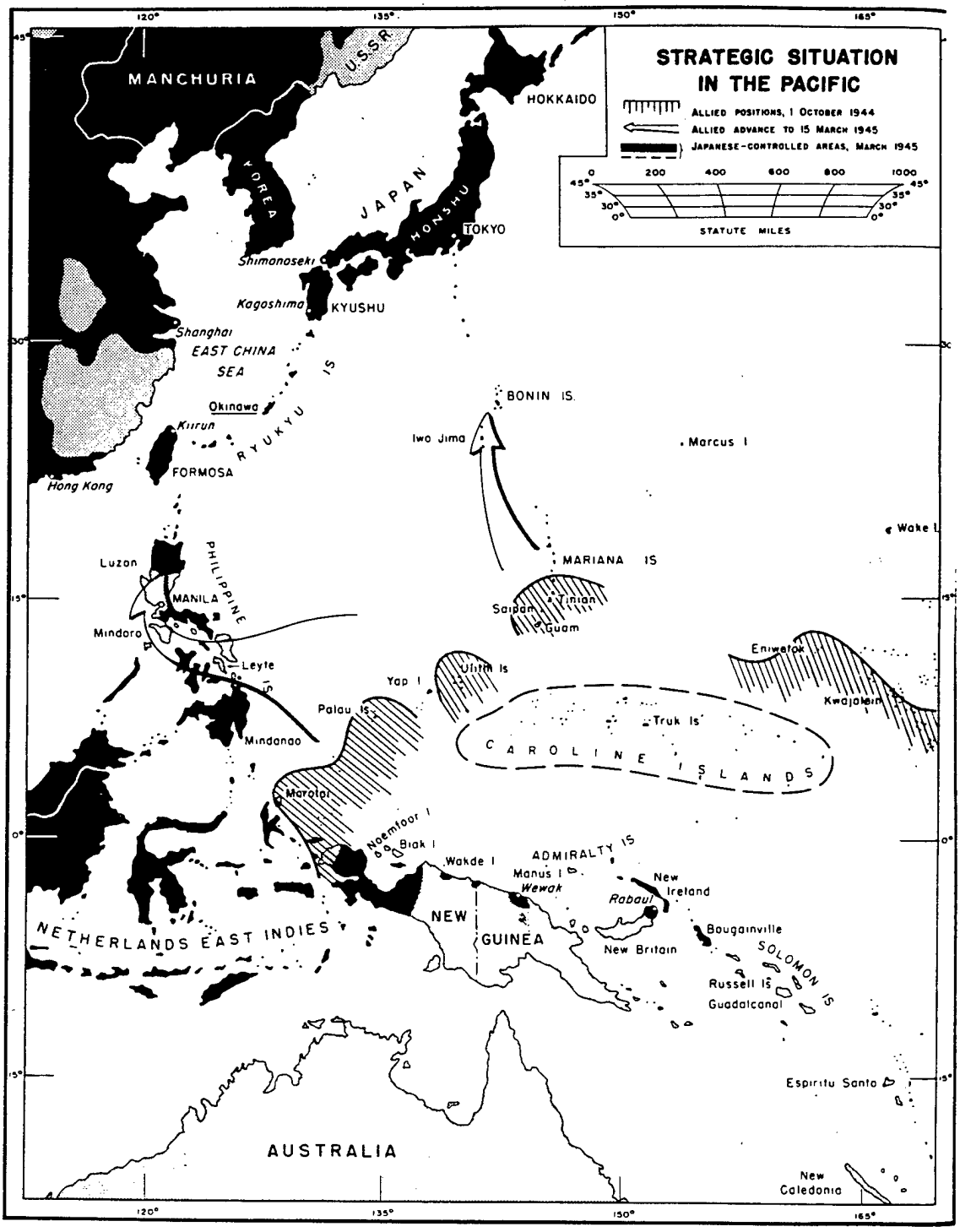


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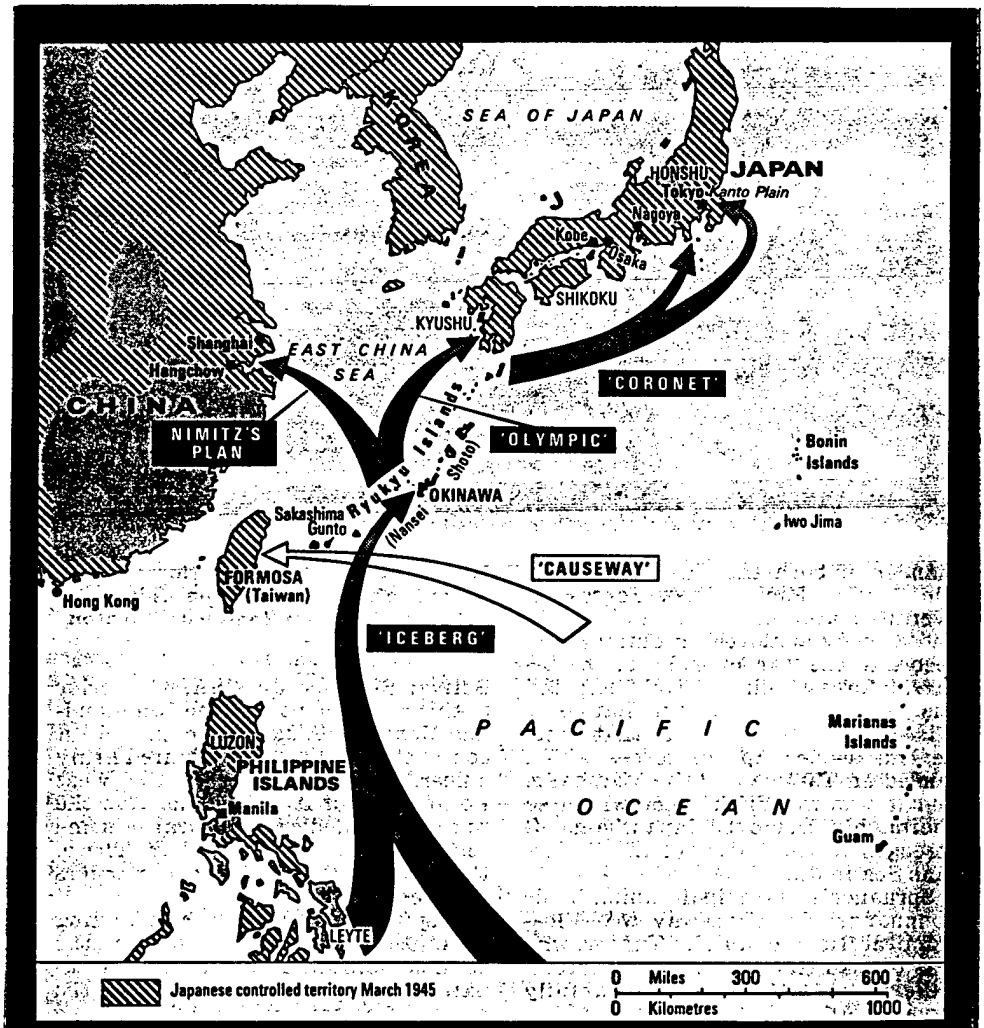


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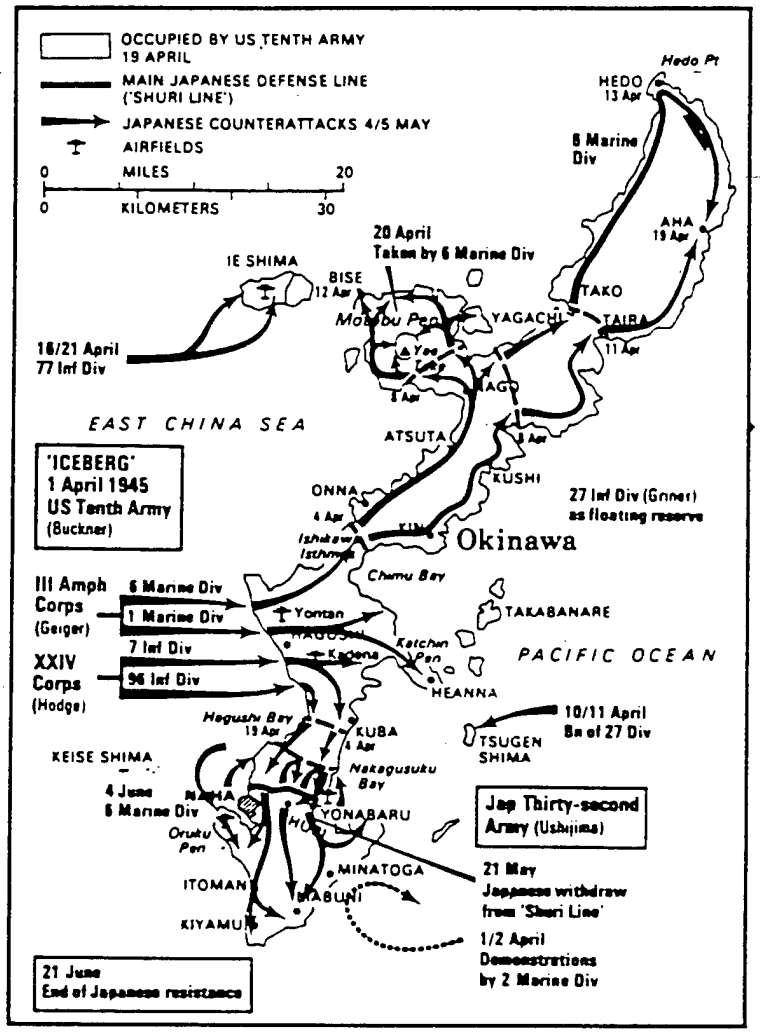


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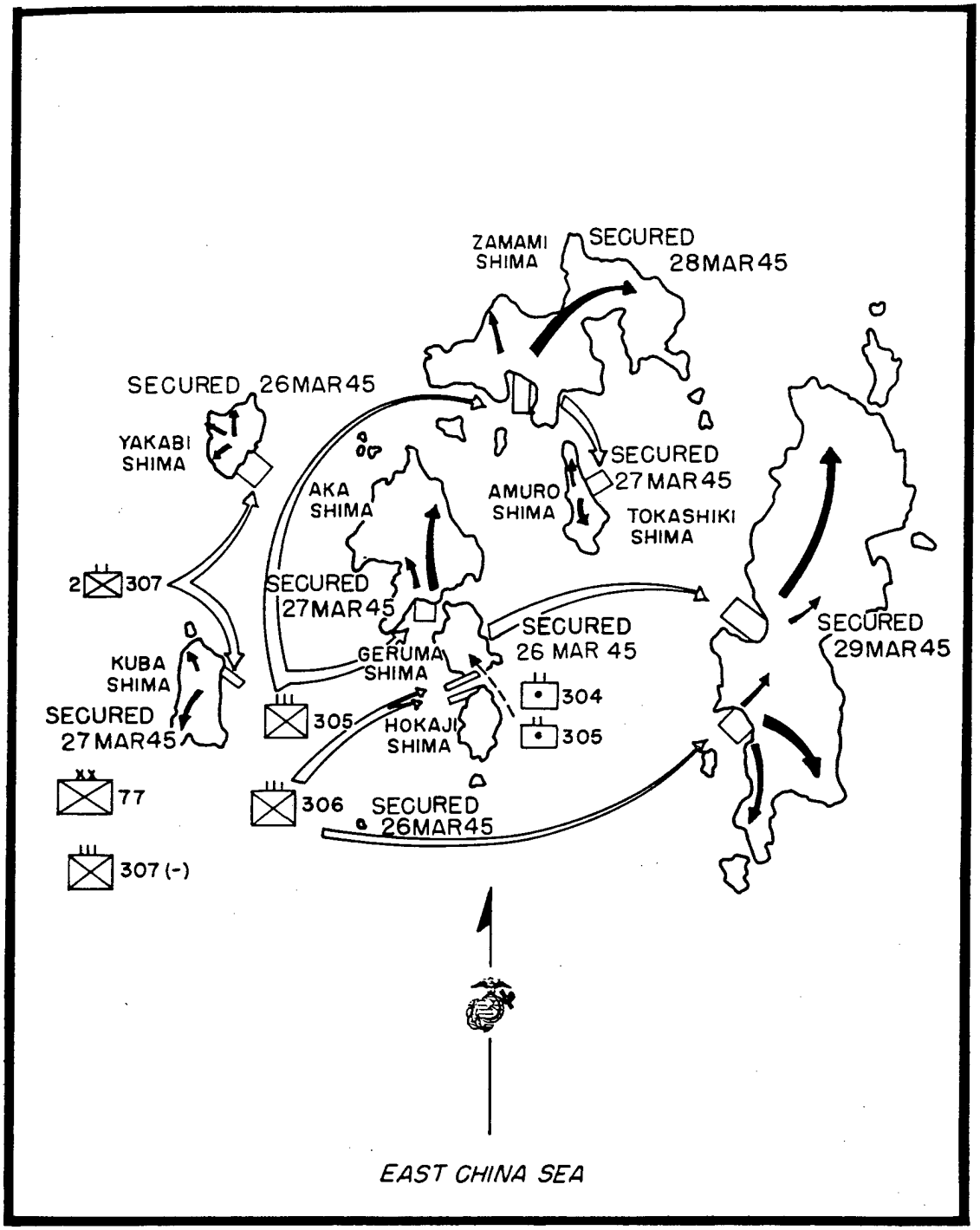


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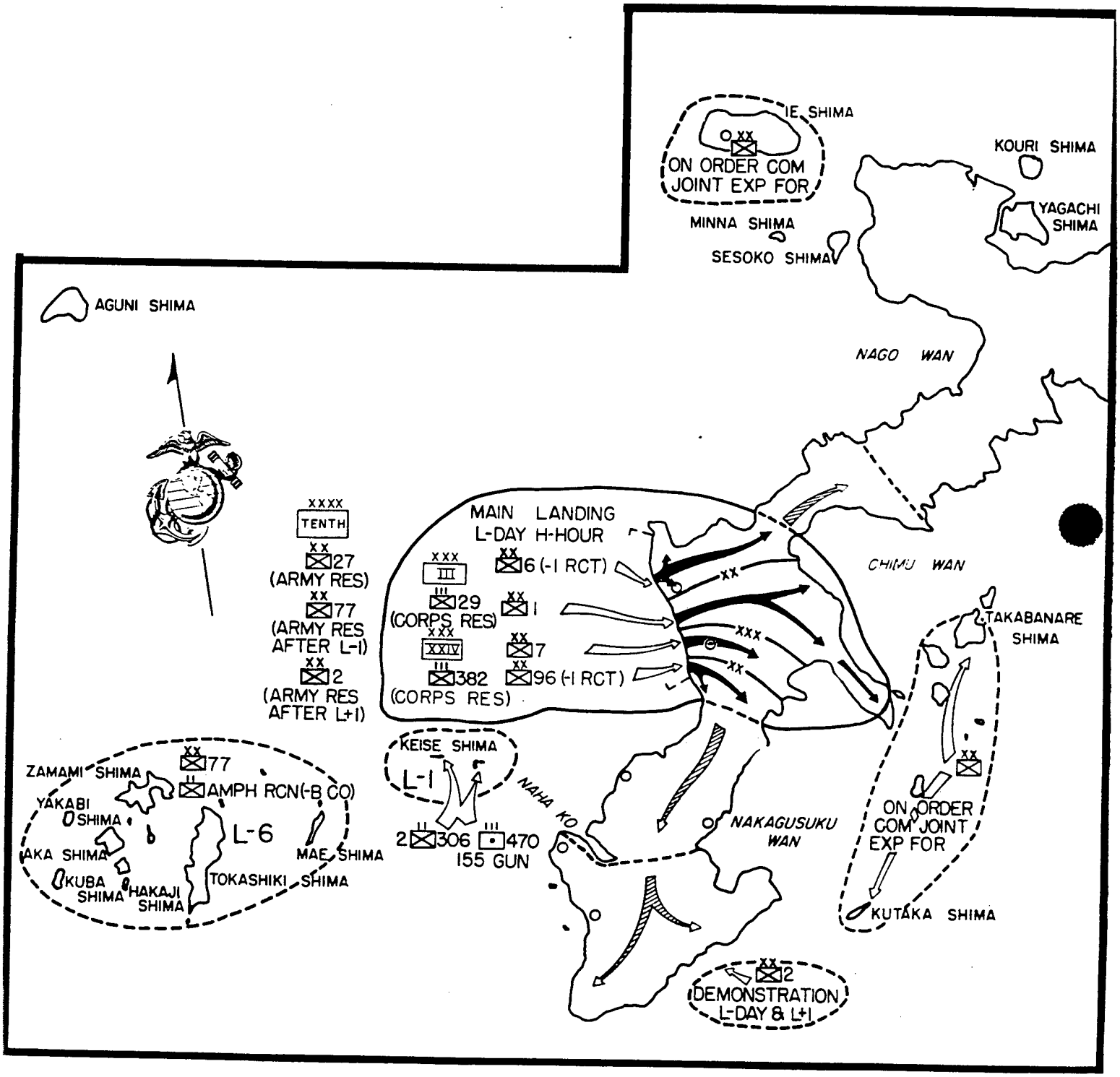


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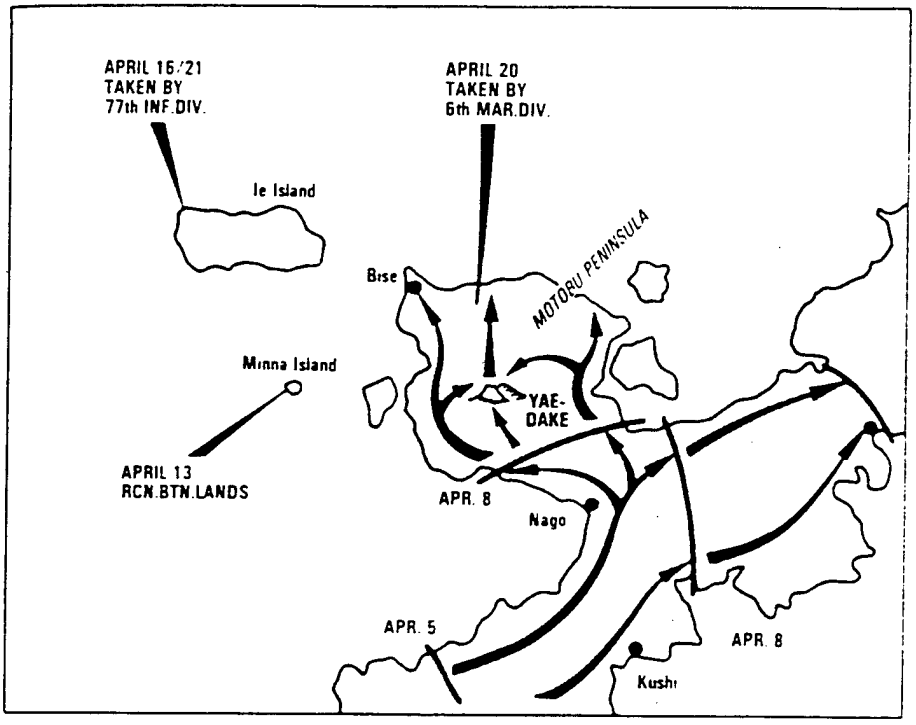


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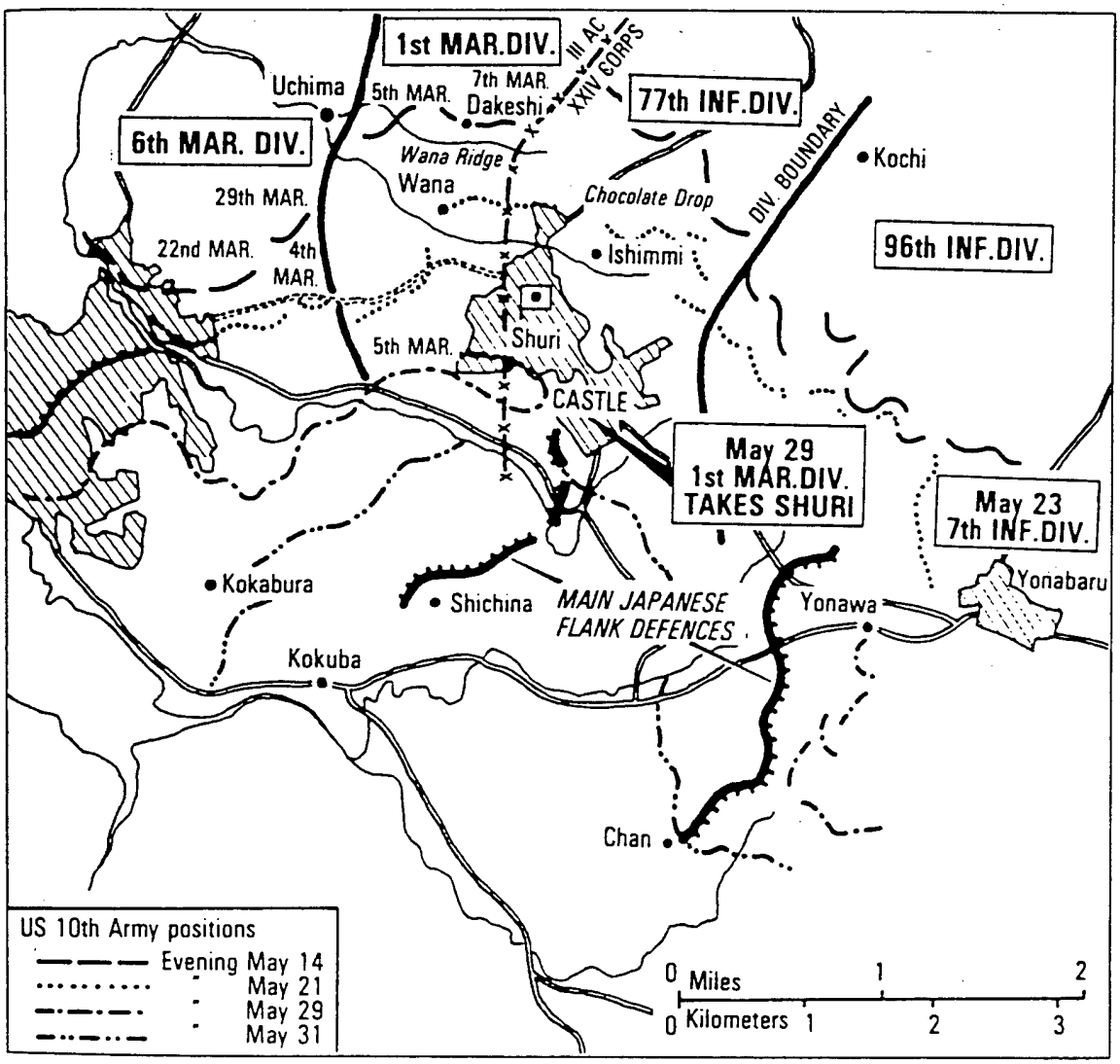


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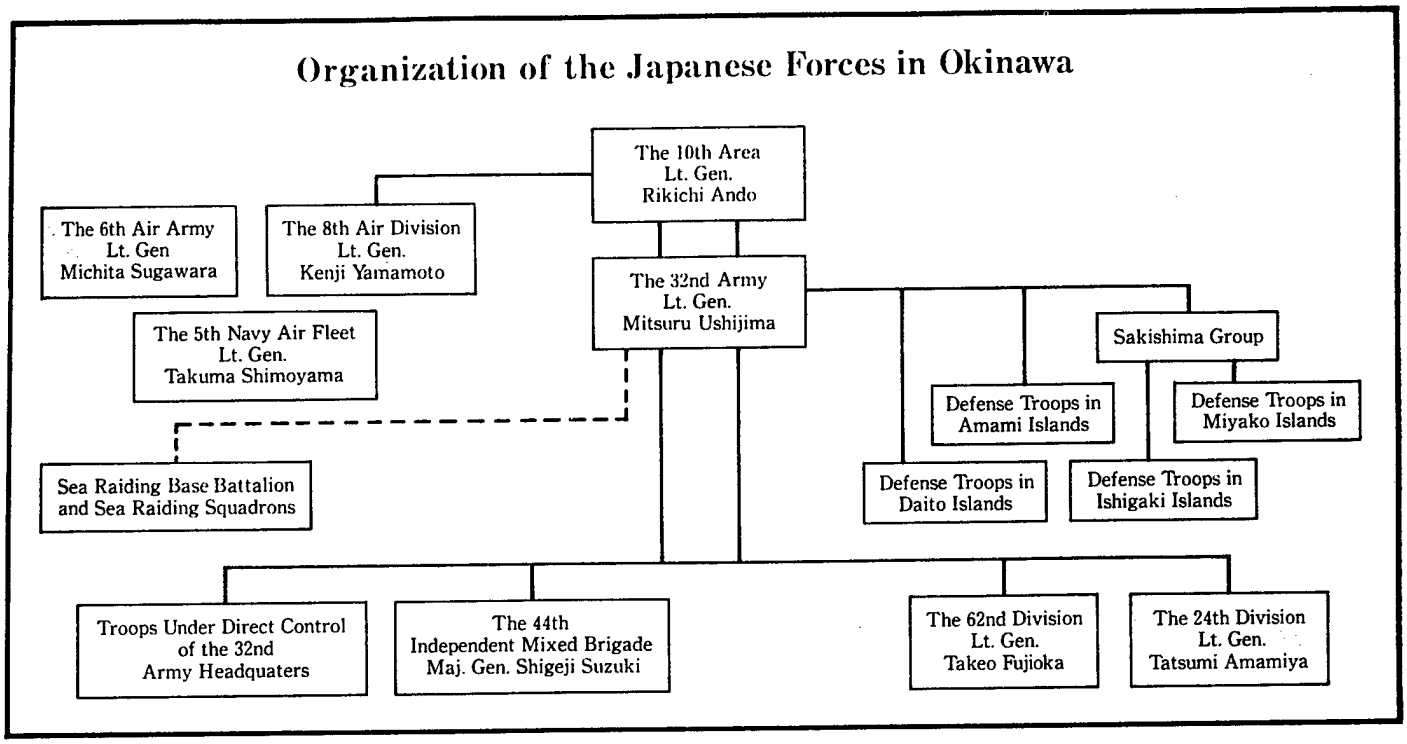


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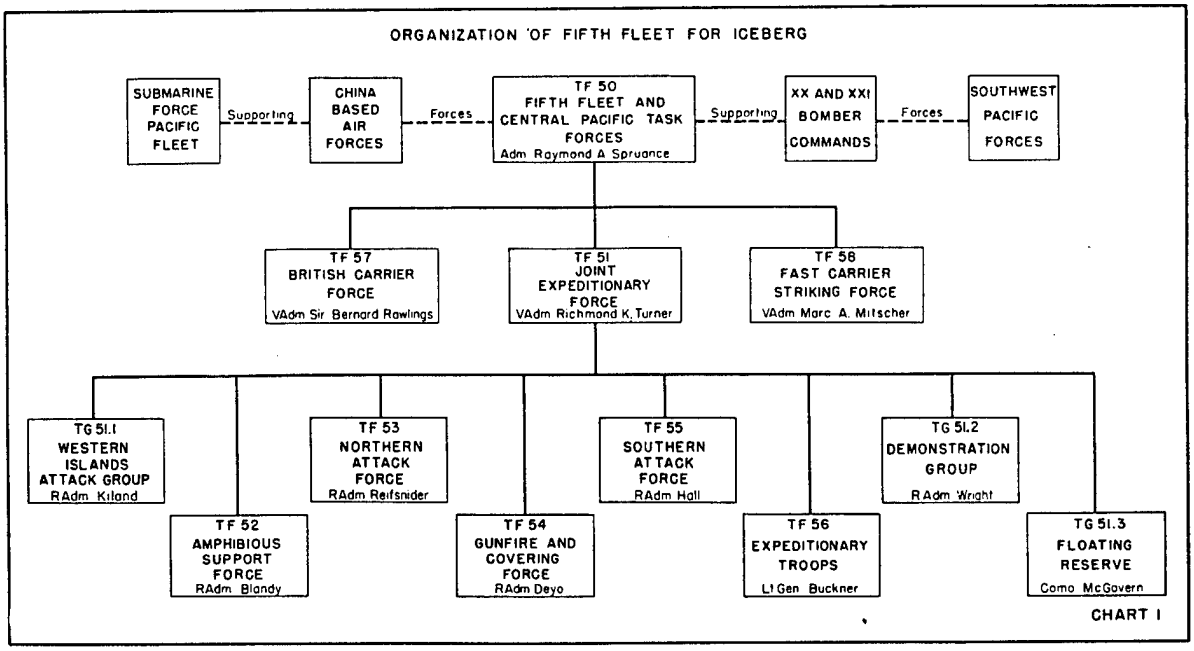


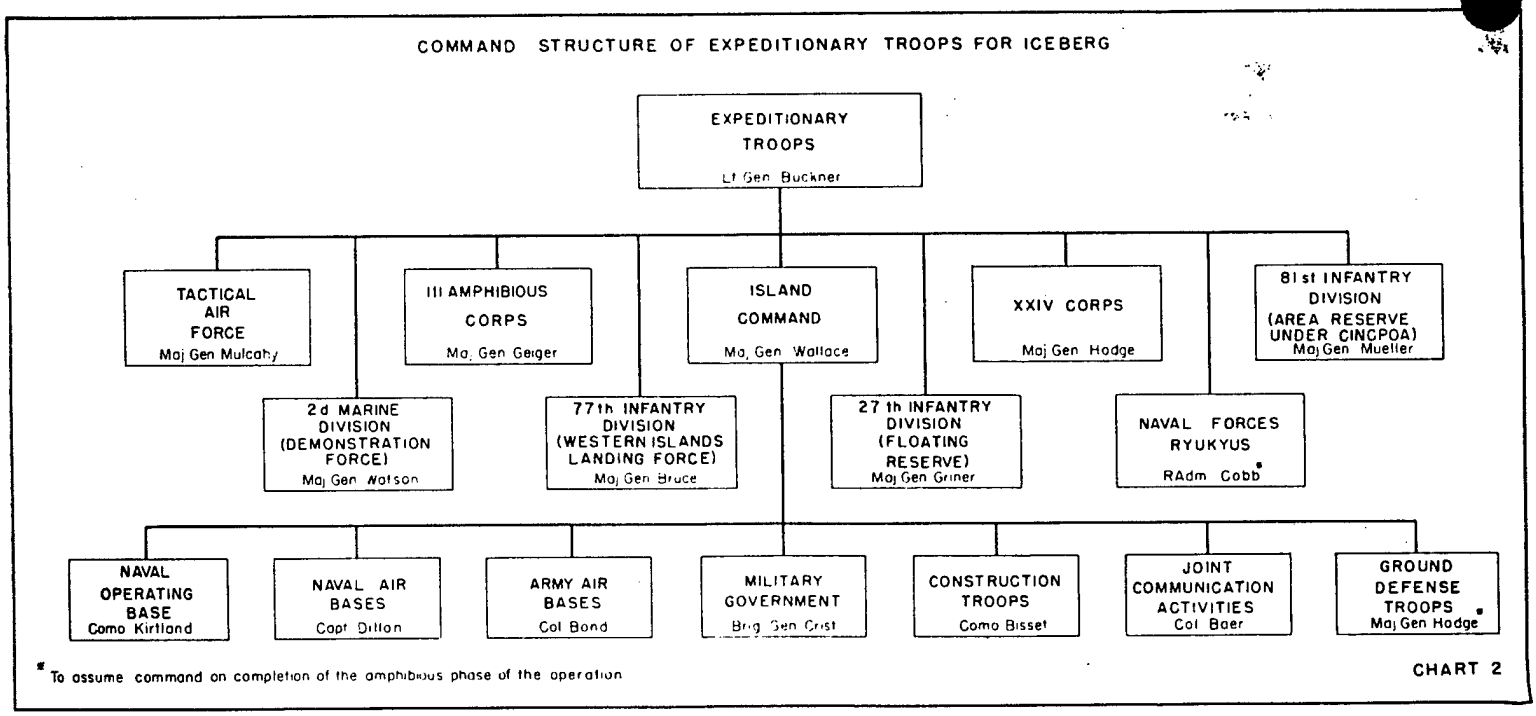


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## INTRODUCTION

*"The gap between strategy and tactics is too large to be bridged without an intermediate area of study and practice; operational art is the principal tool for orchestrating tactical actions to accomplish operational or strategic objectives in theater."*[1]

Milan Vego

The preferred framework for campaign analysis advocated within our war colleges is derived from the evolving concept of *operational art.* This concept is generally defined as "the component of military art that encompasses planning, conducting, and sustaining major operations and campaigns designed to accomplish operational or strategic objectives in a given theater."[2] Central to the concept of *operational art* is the notion of *operational perspective,* referring to the ability to think in terms of broad military objectives and to conceptualize or design campaigns that will accomplish these objectives.[3] An acquired ability, *operational perspective* is the product of deliberate, detailed study of past wars, campaigns, and operations. *Sound military decision-making,* a skill based on recognition of the recurring patterns of war, is also derived from the deliberate study of military history[4]. It follows, then, that the operations and campaigns that best illustrate the practical and theoretical aspects of *operational art* represent the contests most worthy of study (regardless of when and by whom they were fought).

With the aforesaid providing purpose, this paper will examine Operation ICEBERG, the campaign for Okinawa and the adjacent islands comprising the Ryukyus Group, which began on 26 March 1945 and officially ended on 21 June 1945. For purposes of analysis, this paper will concentrate on three aspects of ICEBERG: the origins of the Ryukyus Campaign plan in context of the higher "theater of war" strategy (Pacific Campaign); the *campaign design,* focusing on the

criteria for selection of intermediate objectives; and lastly, a review of the application of *operational art* at the operational-tactical level of war.

Beyond the stated purpose of illustrating the components of *operational art*, there are practical reasons for studying this and similar campaigns. Generally, the study of amphibious operations will remain a valid and necessary endeavor as long as these operations are universally understood to be the most difficult type of military operation. More specific factors and realities also dictate a continuing emphasis on amphibious operations and further underwrite the relevance of historical study in this area. First, there is the probability that similar operations will be conducted in the future. Though the lethality of modern weaponry will create significant challenges for future amphibious operations, contests for islands or island groups are well within the realm of possibilities. U.S. operations in Grenada (1983) and the U.S.- supported British campaign for the Falklands (Malvinas) Islands (1982) lend credibility to this assertion. Though diverse in scale and more so in terms of the sophistication of adversaries, these operations were more similar than dissimilar. Each involved combat operations by joint forces for the specific purpose of gaining control of island groups. More recently, our experience in Desert Shield / Desert Storm provided a "revalidation" of the need for on-going training and equipping for amphibious operations. Though we did not actually conduct landings, we were prepared to do so and with a credible force. That potential was, in terms of *operational art*, the essential element in an extremely successful deception plan.

The on-going refinement of the Navy-Marine Corps Warfighting Concept "Operational Maneuver From the Sea"[5] and the related concept of "Ship To Objective Maneuver"[6] (both having

*operational art* as a theoretical basis) also demand that we revisit and acknowledge the "operational lessons learned" that can be drawn from previous amphibious campaigns.

Finally, with the current emphasis on joint operations it is altogether worthwhile (if not imperative) that we examine previous joint operations -- specifically those which will enable us to properly define the scope of "jointness" and the demands of componency in future wars or contingencies where amphibious operations come into play. The Ryukyus Campaign is ideal in this regard.

## CHAPTER 1

## BACKGROUND

The distribution of Japanese forces throughout the Pacific in the opening phases of World War II provided American war planners with many strategic choices. From a broad strategy formulated by President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill and the Combined Chiefs of Staff initially at the "Casablanca" Conference in early 1943, and subsequently reaffirmed at the "Cairo" Conference in November and December of that year, it was decided that the principal offensive effort of the Pacific War would be based on coordinated advances along multiple axes focused on the south China coast.[7] Forces under General Douglas MacArthur would advance in a northwesterly direction from the Solomons Group through New Guinea and into the Philippines, while forces under Admiral Chester W. Nimitz would move northwesterly through the Gilberts, Marshalls, and Marianas. The Philippines and the Marianas would serve as an operational "springboard" from which American forces would advance on Formosa and the south China coast in preparation for an invasion of the Japanese home islands. By the end of 1944, these "intermediate" objectives were in-hand and planners were beginning to shift their focus toward the eventual invasion of Japan (see Figure 1, p. v).

Through 1943 and 1944, U.S. and British planners were guided by the assumption that the war would last well into 1948 and that an eventual invasion of the Japanese home islands would be an absolute requirement. Based on the successes and corresponding accelerated rates of advance through the southwest and central Pacific, the Joint War Plans Committee (JWPC) began to outline plans for an early invasion of the Japanese home islands, identifying the Bonins, the Ryukyus, and an area of the China coast near Shanghai as intermediate objectives. The

events-timeline associated with this plan called for the seizure of these objectives during the April - June 1945 time-frame, with a follow-on invasion of Kyushu planned for 1 October 1945. Titled "Operations Against Japan Subsequent to Formosa," this plan maintained that Formosa (Taiwan) would have to be reduced to ensure success in the home islands. In effect, the new plans were a "hybrid" of the existing plans, retaining the invasions of the China coast and Formosa and adding the invasion of the home islands.

Continuing success in the late-summer and early-fall of 1944 caused the JWPC to abandon their long-held preoccupation with the China coast and to focus their planning efforts on more direct avenues into Japan's home islands. These revisions provided the basis for planning the eventual invasion of Japan, now confirming the seizure of the Bonins and the Ryukyus as necessary preliminaries.[8] (The differing opinions among the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in reaching a decision on which of the competing strategies to adopt is well documented. A detailed review of these options and their supporting criteria is beyond the scope of this paper. It is, however, interesting to note that the final decisions were reached while the fight for Okinawa was in progress, with planners adopting a direct advance on Japan without a "China phase" (see "OLYMPIC," Figure 2, p. vi).

The rationale for the seizure of the Bonins and the Ryukyus provides an excellent illustration of the operational factors that influence the selection of intermediate objectives. Based on extensive gains in operational reach, ownership of these island groups would provide outstanding staging bases for the planned thrust into Japan. There is an intangible aspect to be considered here, as well. Both of these island groups were part of prefectural Japan and their reduction would represent the initial penetration of Japan's "inner ring" of defenses.[9]

Viewing these objectives in a purely practical sense, the advantages of ownership made them both strategic and operational imperatives. Possession would allow U.S. air and naval power to control the East China Sea and adjacent waters to include the approaches to Korea, Formosa, and China (severing Japan from its access to oil sources in Borneo, Sumatra, and Burma.)[10]

Airfields in these islands would allow B-29 bombers to step-up the strategic bombing campaign of the home islands, ranging the Japanese industrial enclaves in Kyushu and Honshu with ease. Located just 350 miles from Kyushu and a similar distance from Formosa and the China coast, possession of Okinawa would allow the B-29s to reduce their fuel load and increase their bomb loads accordingly. From these forward bases, the heavy bombers would also enjoy fighter escorts, greatly reducing their losses to Japanese fighters operating out of southern Kyushu and improving morale among aircrews. The addition of fighter escorts would also allow the heavy bombers to operate at lower altitudes to achieve increased precision. Further, the short distance between Okinawa and the home islands would allow medium bombers to operate against targets in southern Japan, adding significant "depth" to operations against the home islands. Also significant, both the Bonins and the Ryukyus would provide an emergency air base for crippled aircraft returning from raids over the home islands.[11]

Some planners viewed the Ryukyus as "another England," drawing the comparison between Okinawa and England as a springboard for the invasion of France in 1944. Even if an invasion of the home islands was not necessary, there was an absolute logic for the conquest of Okinawa. It's 485 square miles would support multiple airfields and provide protected fleet anchorages in close proximity to Japan and it's garrisons in China and Formosa.[12]

Perhaps the greatest perceived advantage was derived from a more strategic perspective. The increased tempo of air operations against the home islands afforded by possession of Okinawa might have the effect of ending the war without a costly invasion of Japan proper.[13]

While American war planners generally viewed the Ryukyus as an obvious "stepping-stone" enroute to an invasion of Japan, their Japanese counterparts envisioned a more decisive role for this island group. The focus in the higher-level staffs, appropriately, was on destruction of American seapower. In formulating their strategy for the defense of Japan, key planners in the Imperial General Headquarters (IGHQ) identified the Ryukyus as the "anvil" on which Japanese air arm would "hammer" the American Fleet, ultimately preventing an invasion of the home islands.[14]

In December of 1944, the IGHQ abandoned the idea of waging a defensive battle on Leyte. They anticipated that the direction of the American advance would be via the Philippines and on to southern China, where airbases would be built to facilitate the reduction of the Ryukyus and the Bonins. An alternate plan would be the reverse, with the Bonins (Iwo Jima) first, then on to the Ryukyus (Okinawa) or Formosa. In wargaming these moves, the IGHQ correctly assessed the value of Iwo Jima in terms of the added "operational reach" it would provide as a base for American heavy and medium bombers and their fighter escorts. The garrison there was strengthened accordingly.[15]

The IGHQ also strengthened the defenses in Formosa in response to the worsening situation in the Philippines. The two additional divisions sent to Formosa included the 9th Division, which was reassigned from Okinawa. This was a matter of controversy within the staff at the time of the decision. General Mitsuru Ushijima, commanding the Japanese 32nd Army in

the Ryukyus, would later openly lament the loss of this battle-hardened division and the resulting handicap to his defensive plans. Plans were made to replace the 9th Division with the 84th Division, but these were over-ruled by First Bureau Chief Miyazaki in favor of retaining the 84th Division for home defense purposes. This issue was representative of the emerging discordance between the strategic concept of "a decisive struggle in the home islands" favored by government leaders, and the IGHQ's concept of a "peripheral defense in depth." [16]

Based on the IGHQ orders issued to the Tenth Area Army Commander, the focus of operations beginning 3 February 1945 was disruption of American attempts to advance air and naval bases in the direction of Formosa and Okinawa. These orders had the effect of clarifying the higher headquarters "intent" regarding Okinawa. As they did not implement the plans for decisive battle in the Ryukyus and Formosa (code-named "Sho-2"), it was clear that the concept of decisive battle in the home islands had become the preferred course of action.[17] Actions in and around Okinawa would, therefore, consist of operations designed to deny or delay American attempts to establish forward naval bases and air fields.

Code-named "Ten-go," the Japanese plan for the defense of the Ryukyus was centered around a powerful air component of over 4000 aircraft including both conventional and *kamikaze* (suicide) squadrons. In addition to this formidable air attack element, the defensive plans included several squadrons of suicide small craft ("Special Boat Units"), and a number of Japanese warships to include the battleship *Yamato. As* the main effort, the air component would operate from bases in Formosa, where the Japanese Army's 8th Air Division and the Navy's 1st Air Fleet were based, and from southern Kyushu where a more powerful force was created by combining several Army and Navy commands under Vice Admiral Ugaki. The general effect of the orders

issued in early February, then, was to effect coordination between the Army and Navy High Commands, thus unifying their air assets for purposes of breaking up the imminent American thrust.[18]

At this juncture, there was a divergence of opinion among officers in the Japanese Army and Navy. The Navy officers generally viewed "Ten-go" as the last opportunity to achieve a great and redeeming victory. The Army officers, on the other hand, held fast to the idea that the final decisive battle would be fought on the home island of Kyushu. Though conflicting, each of these views had it's own logic. The "Navy" argument was simple. If air power failed to stop the Americans at Okinawa, then it would also fail to stop them at Kyushu. The Army view was based on the rationale that even in the Philippines the Americans had not yet encountered a major Japanese army. When shattered by the strength of the combined air forces, the Americans would be easily repulsed in the home islands. It was obvious to all, however, that a severe defeat was necessary to compel the American's to modify their demand for an unconditional surrender.[19]

## CHAPTER 2

## GENERAL USHIJIMA'S DEFENSIVE PLANS

Mid-year 1944 brought a general "shift" or transition in Japanese tactics.[20] This shift represented a departure from the "bamboo-spear" tactics, or tactics based on the wholly illogical belief that the individual soldier's spiritual power could counter his opponent's firepower. It was this doctrine or ideology that parented both the massed nocturnal "banzai" charges and the costly attempts to halt the enemy "at the waters edge" displayed throughout the earlier phases of the war. These tactics so weakened the defenders at the outset of battle that they could not continue to resist. Considered from an operational-tactical perspective, these flawed tactics may well be the critical vulnerability that allowed the Americans to advance across the Pacific in such rapid fashion, placing them at Japan's "front door" in early 1945.

The concept of *defense in depth* was pioneered for the Japanese at Biak, a large island to the west of New Guinea, by Colonel Kuzume Naoyuki. Commanding a garrison of 11,000 troops, Naoyuki established a defense which he referred to as "ambush and delay." The concept proved to be as simple as it was effective, or "as careful as the banzai was reckless, as difficult to overcome as the banzai was easy to defeat."[21] Naoyuki's defenders built a system of successive, mutually-supporting positions well off the beaches of Biak, carefully pre-stocking them with both munitions and water (the absence of which would have extracted casualties in numbers equal to the effects of enemy weapons.) On May 27, 1944, Naoyuki's troops decimated the U.S Army's 162nd Infantry Regiment as they entered into his prepared defensive network. These tactics were subsequently used at Peleliu and again at Iwo Jima, significantly lengthening both battles and causing tremendous casualties in the American assault forces.

With Biak, Peleliu, and Iwo Jima as examples, and with the guidance of his practical-thinking Operations officer Colonel Hiroshi Yahara, these were the tactics adopted by General Ushijima for the defense of Okinawa. When reviewed by the IGHQ in Tokyo, Ushijima's plans were regarded as remarkably sound -- and entirely complimentary in terms of the overall "Ten-go" plan. The American invasion fleet would be lured within range of the "special" (suicide) air and sea squadrons while concentrated in the approaches to the Ryukyus. While disembarking the landing forces, the Fifth Fleet would be subjected to the effects of the massed air attacks. With their supporting fleet attritted or retreating to avoid wholesale devastation, Ushijima's 32nd Army would launch a series of aggressive counterattacks to defeat the Americans in detail.

Forces comprising the Japanese 32nd Army numbered in excess of 100,000, though U.S. intelligence reports estimated their number at between 60,000 and 70, 000 (see Figure 8, p. xii). Ushijima used these numbers masterfully in devising a terrain-oriented defense that would withstand the continuous assault of forces five times larger for almost three months.

## CHAPTER 3

## THE RYUKYUS CAMPAIGN PLAN

As originally conceived, the Ryukyus campaign plan was divided into three phases. The initial phase involved the reduction of the outlying Kerama islands and the small island of Keise Shima six days prior to the main assault. These islands would provide a fleet anchorage and an artillery fire-base in support of the main landings. Following the capture of these adjacent islands, the assault forces would land across the west coast Hagushi beaches, attack across Okinawa at the narrow Ishikawa Isthmus, and pivoting, continue the attack to seize the southernmost portion of the island (see Figure 3, p. vii). The second phase included the capture of Ie Shima, an island slightly larger than Iwo Jima located to the northwest (just beyond the Motobu Peninsula), followed by operations to secure the northern third of the island. Phase three would involve the capture of Miyako Jima, located at the mid-point between Okinawa and Formosa.[22]

The operational factor driving this approach was the assumption that the stepped-up carrier based air attacks on Japan coupled with the intensified air operations from the Marianas and the fall of Iwo Jima would force the Japanese to concentrate their air power in the interior of the home islands. The invasion of the Ryukyus would cause a "violent reaction," subjecting the expeditionary force to massed air attacks staged from Kyushu and Formosa. The intent then, was to rapidly secure two major airfields located in the center of Okinawa, followed by the large airfield on Ie Shima (the largest airfield in Asia at the time), allowing the invasion force to maintain "positive air control." Both U.S. and British carrier task forces were used to screen the northern and western flanks of the invasion force against hostile surface and air attack. Aircraft from Spruance's Fifth Fleet were tasked to provide direct support for the ground forces.[23]

## CHAPTER 4

## PRE-ASSAULT OPERATIONS

The U.S. invasion of the Keramas, a supporting operation designed to gain control of a group of small islands located fifteen miles west of Okinawa, provides the basis for an interesting study in the selection of operational objectives and assessing the value of these objectives using the varying criteria of friendly and opposing forces.

Code named "FOX", this operation was the geographic "centerpiece" in the U.S. plan to isolate the main objective, Okinawa. Fifth Fleet planners considered the reduction of the Keramas "an indispensable precondition" for success in the Ryukyus Campaign. General Ushijima also recognized their value to the U.S. invasion force, though he and his staff failed to properly assess the priority American planners would affix to this cluster of seven small islands. Having misread their value to his opponent, the Japanese commander also failed to predict *when* the invasion force would invade the Keramas.[24]

From the U.S. planning perspective, the Keramas offered a number of distinct advantages. First, the irregular coastlines and the 40 - 70 meter depth of the channels dividing these islands would provide an outstanding sheltered anchorage from which to conduct transfer of logistics and fleet battle damage repair activities. Secondly, the Keramas would provide a base for seaplane operations. The PBYs and PBMs were needed to perform the critical mission of long-range aerial reconnaissance focused on identifying any sea-borne threat to the forces assembled for the invasion of Okinawa. These same aircraft would support the recovery of downed airmen during air operations planned against airfields in Kyushu and other locations in the Japanese home islands

(these air attacks comprising another element of the plan to isolate the main objective and to protect the invasion fleet from land-based aircraft operating out of southern Japan.)

The Keramas were invaded on 26 - 29 March 1945 and quickly reduced by the U.S. Army's 77th Infantry Division. Keise Island, located only eight miles from the southwestern coast of Okinawa and eleven miles from the initial landing beaches, was also successfully invaded during this time-frame. Keise would provide an artillery base from which 155 millimeter artillery batteries could support the landing force during the assault and as the invasion force worked it's way south toward Naha, Okinawa's capital city (see Figure 4, p. viii).

The reduction of these islands was anticipated by Ushijima's staff. However, they predicted that these operations would be sequenced to follow the invasion of Okinawa proper and that the U.S. invasion fleet would approach the landing beaches to the east of the Keramas. Based on these assumptions, the defenders positioned 350 small plywood "suicide" boats in the Keramas. These boats were of two designs, with one type carrying two depth charges and the other equipped with a powerful explosive charge designed to detonate when the boat was deliberately rammed into transport or other shipping. This fleet of small craft had the tactical mission of infiltrating the American transport groups on the night prior to the invasion of Okinawa. As the "seaborne" element of the combined air and surface plan for attriting the transport fleet, these "special boat squadrons" represented a critical element in the overall defensive plan -- a classic "economy of force" operation.[25]

Based on their confidence in these boat squadrons, the early invasion of the Keramas represented a major setback for Ushijima and his staff. This setback might have been avoided if Ushijima had adopted a more decentralized concept for the employment of these craft. The

timely dispersion of these boats among the numerous small islands and islets surrounding Okinawa (and along the many bays and inlets of Okinawa proper) may have resulted in significant losses for the invasion fleet. Several of these boats, located elsewhere, were eventually employed against the invasion fleet and are credited with sinking one of the thirty-six ships lost during ICEBERG.[26]

The Keramas, then, represented a "critical point" in both the offensive strategy of the invading force and in the defensive strategy of the occupying force.

## CHAPTER 5

## TENTH ARMY PLANS AND THE CONDUCT OF BATTLE

In compliance with the stated operational objectives, General Buckner's "scheme of maneuver ashore" focused on the rapid seizure of Okinawa's narrow "waist," consolidation and development of the Kadena and Yomitan airfields, followed by a coordinated multi-division attack to seize the northern expanse and Ie Shima (see Figure 5, p. ix). Buckner task-organized the newly-activated Tenth Army into northern and southern landing forces, with an Army Corps (three-divisions) under Major General John R. Hodge tasked with seizing the southern end of the island. The III Marine Amphibious Corps (two divisions) under Major General Roy S. Geiger was tasked with northern sector operations. The task organization also included a division-sized demonstration force, and division-sized floating and area reserves. The division tasked as a floating reserve would also be tasked with assaulting Ie Shima (see Figure 6, p. x).

The initial landings (1 April 1945) went remarkably well based on the deliberate absence of resistance from Ushijima's forces. Ironically, the amphibious force conducting a diversionary feint off the southeastern beaches at Minotagawa suffered the only significant "L-day" casualties when several *kamikaze* aircraft attacked their transports. More than 50,000 troops were ashore at the close of the first day, with the lack of resistance "fueling doubt and suspicion."

Buckner significantly revised the plan after the first three days, basing his decisions on the early seizure of key objectives (Kadena and Yomitan airfields). The rapid advance of both Army and Marine units had the effect of "cutting" the island in half eleven days ahead of schedule. Buckner ordered Geiger's III Marine Amphibious Corps to immediately attack north towards Motobu Peninsula, while Hodge's XXIV Corps made the pivot to the south.

By the close of the seventh day ashore, the three Army divisions began to encounter stiff resistance. Ushijima had decided to concentrate his forces in the south, selecting a series of prominent ridges running east-west as his main line of defense. Alternately referred to as the "Shuri complex" or "Naha - Shuri - Yonabaru Line," these defenses were the product of seven months of continuous effort by the 100,000 soldiers, sailors, and civilian laborers comprising the Japanese 32nd Army. The Tenth Army would chisel away at this elaborate defensive network for weeks, mounting several general offensives, while the Fifth Fleet would lose the equivalent of one and one-half ships per day to *kamikaze* attacks.[27]

Advances from mid-through-late May were measured in yards (see Figure 7, p. xi). Repetitive frontal assaults along the Naha - Shuri - Yonabaru line would exact the "lions share" of more than 40,000 U.S. casualties, to include 7,000 dead. Buckner's reluctance to abandon this "head-on" attrition-style of battle, despite repeated prodding from numerous flag and general officers, provides one of the most salient lessons in *operational art* to be deduced from this campaign.

## CHAPTER 6

## ANALYSIS OF OPERATIONS ASHORE

Concerning Tenth Army's actual conduct of the battle for Okinawa, perhaps the most overt and valid criticisms focus on the reluctance to engage in operational or tactical innovation in the application of combat power. Specifically, these criticisms identify Buckner's adherence to a "seige-type" (attrition) warfare methodology throughout the course of the battle, thus "playing directly into the enemy's defenses." This criticism is based primarily on as his failure to use available forces to conduct supporting amphibious landings in the south of Okinawa during the period lasting from mid-April through mid-June 1945. Inherent to the amphibious task force assembled for ICEBERG, there were many opportunities to achieve surprise through amphibious maneuver. Failure to exploit the potentials and capabilities of the assembled forces undoubtedly resulted in greater losses and probably extended the duration of fighting by weeks.[28]

Having proffered this assertion with the benefit of hindsight, an examination of the facts is due. The forces and physical means were certainly available. Based on the lack of opposition in the opening phases, both amphibious tractors and conventional boat-type landing craft were readily available in quantities to support multi-division landings. The availability of amphibious shipping was also sufficient, again based on the absence of any significant attrition and as also evidenced by Nimitz's documented consideration of options in this regard. Sufficient assault forces were available to Tenth Army. Following the initial amphibious feint off Minotagawa in support of the initial landings, the 2nd Marine Division remained embarked aboard Fifth Fleet Shipping as a Corps Reserve until administratively retrograded to a "safe" area (Saipan). This division, comprised of battle-tested veterans of Peleliu, remained aboard their combat-loaded

transports. The U.S. Army's 77th Division initially remained embarked as a floating Corps reserve until landing on Ie Shima on 16 April. This division was also available to Buckner, save for the five-day Ie Shima operation.[29] There were also significant forces available from among those initially landed based on limited opposition, no attrition, rapid seizure of objectives, and the inability of the narrow cross-island battle front that developed in the south to "absorb" the forces ashore. This front, beginning several miles north of Naha on the west coast and extending across the island through Shuri to a point just above Yonabaru, was only 8000 meters long -- much too narrow for three divisions occupying the type of terrain found on Okinawa (see Figure 7, p. xi) For the same reasons, sufficient air and naval gunfire assets were also available to make this a viable option.

Beyond the available means, a number of early successes with smaller (division and division minus) amphibious forces might have at least invited the attention of the commanders and their staff toward ancillary landings. First, the success of the "L-Day" (1 April 1945) feint conducted by the 2nd Marine Division off the southeast coast of Okinawa might have suggested that a similar or a series of feints on the flanks of Ushijima's main line of defense might have broken the stalemates that halted progress through the middle of May. Secondly, the successful landing on Oroku Peninsula on 4 June 1945 might have, by itself, made this option attractive by establishing that the 32nd Army lacked the forces and mobility to respond to a significant threat below the Naha - Shuri - Yonabaru defensive line. Though remarkably and immediately successful, the landings on Ie Shima and Oroku Peninsula were the only division-sized landings conducted after "L-Day." [30]

The early successes of the Army's 77th Division and Sixth Marine Division in the north of Okinawa are also part of this argument. These forces quickly reduced the Japanese defenses on Ie Island and Motobu Peninsula respectively, following through with rapid movement to Hedo at Okinawa's extreme north, thus eliminating the need to reserve forces for any threat from the north (see Figure 6, p. x).

Beyond these successes, and even in their absence, the stalemate and tremendous losses suffered along the Naha - Shuri - Yonabaru line should have stimulated Buckner to consider landings to the south. Though Buckner did not survive the battle for Okinawa, there is a record of his perceptions at this juncture in the contest for Okinawa:

"General Buckner, in reviewing the first 30 days on the island, freely conceded that the offensive launched on April 19 had lost its momentum, but firmly declared that the campaign would be fought as planned, without undue haste, because "American lives are too precious to be sacrificed to impatience." " [31]

This controversy did not wait for battle's end. A May 28, 1945 New York *Herald Tribune* dispatch originated by correspondent Homer Bigart (a veteran of the Anzio and Salerno landings) read:

"Our tactics were ultra-conservative. Instead of an end-run, we persisted in frontal attacks. It was hey-diddle-diddle straight down the middle. Our intention to commit the entire force in a general assault was apparently so obvious that the Japanese quickly disposed their troops in such a way as most effectively to block our advance." [32]

Admiral Nimitz addressed this issue in this way:

"When the Marines had completed their task in the northern end of the island, my own staff, as well as those of other commanders concerned, restudied thoroughly the various possibilities for new landings to take the Japanese defenses in reverse, as well as other tactical plans. Being fully aware that delays ashore would increase losses afloat, I flew with my staff to Okinawa for two days and conferred with General Buckner and other commanders present with respect to the strategic and tactical situation ashore. His (Buckner's) tactical decisions were his own, but they had my concurrence and that of the senior naval commanders concerned." [33]

Nimitz based his support of Buckner's tactics on the paucity of satisfactory beaches in the south of Okinawa and on the probable difficulties of supplying more than a division-sized element removed from the mid-island lodgement. This supporting argument does not, however, address the potential for landings to the south during the earliest phases of the battle, in that the stalemate lasting from mid-April and well into June along the Naha - Shuri - Yonabaru line was the catalyst for Nimitz's visit with Buckner.

If the U.S. forces were predisposed to ignore the potential for maneuver afforded by the sea surrounding Okinawa, their opponents were not. On the night of 3 May 1945, a battalion-strength Japanese force embarked in landing barges conducted a two-pronged assault against the flanks of the U.S. Army's 7th Division on the east coast and behind the 1st Marine Division on the west coast. Detected early-on, the force attacking the 7th Division was destroyed before it cleared the beach. The west coast assault force, sub-divided into three elements, was able to land along a three-mile length of beach. It took the combined efforts of both the 1st Marine Division and the adjacent U.S. Army 96th Division to contain and destroy this force.[34] The limited success of this bold thrust may be considered a function of the size of the attacking

element. Though the seaward approaches were under their opponent's control, the Japanese force was able to maneuver along both the east and west coasts, effect a landing into the enemy's rear under the cover of darkness, and inflict casualties while tying down elements of two U.S. divisions--before being overwhelmed by superior strength. Though historically treated as "another battlefield vignette," this action certainly lends strength to the argument that similar actions using superior (U.S.) strength might have opened the "back door" to Ushijima's defenses and shortened the battle for the southern end of Okinawa.

Looking beyond the collective failure to adapt more imaginative tactics to the situation, there is another tactical issue worthy of study. Night operations, in the few instances in which they were undertaken, produced significant results for both U.S. Army and Marine components of the Expeditionary Force. Remarkably, these battlefield successes were not exploited by either component (nor were they encouraged by their mutual higher headquarters.)[35] In the early years of the Pacific war, Marine units typically restricted night operations to small patrolling activities, preferring instead to establish fixed positions supported by well-planned organic and heavier indirect fire plans. This was largely in response to the infiltration tactics and night counterattacks that typified their Japanese opponents. Battle records from the Ryukyus Campaign document 16 Marine and several U.S. Army night operations, each producing favorable results as measured by reduced casualties and attrition of the enemy proportionately greater than would have been expected for similar actions conducted in daylight hours.[36] Again, with the clarity of hindsight, it would seem that the friendly casualty figures along the Naha - Shuri - Yonabaru line would have compelled field commanders to endorse night operations on a grander scale. Night operations were included in U.S. doctrine and training had been conducted accordingly. At

the conclusion of the Ryukyus Campaign, the Commanding General of the III Marine Amphibious Corps reported that the experiences with night operations performed in an "orthodox manner" were entirely successful. The 16 documented Marine night operations consisted of reconnaissance, relief of front line units, and pre-dawn attacks focused on near objectives from which larger daylight attacks could be launched.[37] These types of tactical activities are considered essential in terms of achieving results against an enemy fighting a determined battle from a series of fixed, mutually supporting positions characteristic of the 32nd Army on Okinawa.

The 27th Infantry Division conducted the most successful documented night operation by U.S. Army forces. Having read the translation of a captured Japanese intelligence report which indicated that U.S. forces were reluctant to attack at night, Major General George Griner elected to use a night attack to cross Machinato Inlet on 19 April 1945. (Though initially successful, this attack was repulsed by a superior Japanese force later in the day. The indication for U.S. forces was that night attacks could be employed successfully, but that the momentum achieved must be exploited by rapid follow-on attacks.) This assertion is supported by the results achieved by the 22nd Marines in a night river-crossing and follow-on attack across the Asa River on 10 May 1945, and a subsequent forced crossing of the canal that divided the city of Naha and a follow-on attack on 29 May 1945 (also conducted by 22nd Marines.) [38]

Colonel Hiromichi Yahara, 32nd Army's Operations Officer, indicated that on the occasions when they were employed, American night attacks were "particularly effective, achieving complete surprise" and later adding that U.S. night operations "caught them both physically and psychologically off-guard."[39]

Author Gilbert Cant appropriately summarizes the issue of unimaginative employment of forces during this campaign in his 1946 book titled The Great Pacific Victory. Cant concludes that "since the debate involves a hypothesis, that an action that was not undertaken might have been more effective and cheaper than one which was undertaken, the issue can never be determined with finality." Though this statement can be readily applied to many other campaigns and battles over the course of history, it is very fitting in this instance. However, from the perspective of *operational art* as we define it today, the casualties sustained in U.S. ground forces along the Japanese main line of defense and the unprecedented losses sustained by the Fifth Fleet while remaining on station in support of Tenth Army certainly strengthen the argument that a more indirect approach should have been considered by Buckner and his staff.

## CHAPTER 7

## CONCLUSIONS

"The fundamental principle underlying all operations of war is to project superior combat power, successively, upon the decisive points of a theater of war-- is simplicity itself. The difficulty lies in recognizing these points and selecting the most favorable lines of operation."[40]

Charles I. Nichols

As with any operation of similar scope, there are many lessons to be learned from the Ryukyus campaign. As the final campaign of the Pacific War, the Ryukyus Campaign is often over-looked or over-shadowed by the dropping of atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, if not by the end of the war itself.

In assessing this campaign, most historians and authors focus on the unprecedented cooperation displayed among the services as a milestone in the evolution of joint operations. Others focus on this campaign as the "consummation" of the amphibious doctrine first conceived in the 20's and 30's and validated in both the European and Pacific theaters during World War II.

There is, however, much to be learned from this campaign via a working analysis of the operational decisions, actions, and inactions which influenced the eventual outcome. These lessons are particularly valid in the context of *operational art*, based on the air, land, and sea aspects and the extreme distances involved.

Unique to this campaign, perhaps, is the fact that the main objective remains as strategically and operationally important today as it was to it's conquerors in 1945.

## ENDNOTES

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29. Nichols and Shaw, p. 25.

30. Alexander, p. 51.

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33. Ibid., p. 380.

34. James R. Stockman, "Night Operations on Okinawa, " Marine Corps Gazette, September 1946, p. 22.

35. Alexander, p. 51.

36. Stockman, p. 20.

37. Ibid., p. 23.

38. Ibid., p. 23-24.

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